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ABSTRACT

The articles in this publication look at how tests can be used to improve the quality of reading instruction and more generally at what excellence in a reading program means. Among the topics are: changes in the reading assessment prepared by the National Assessment of Educational Progress; a discussion of the limitations and possibilities of competency testing; how the National Diffusion Network and the Joint Dissemination Review Panel work together to help interested educators learn about programs used successfully in other school districts; and interviews with two educators about how they help parents, teachers, and the community understand test scores. Reviews are included of four resources for evaluating the reading fundamentals of teachers, for evaluating a school reading program, for evaluating bilingual education programs, and for evaluating literacy tests for adults. (1J)

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REPORTING ON

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**RIGHT TO
READ**



THIS ISSUE:

READING & MEASUREMENT

BRIEFLY...

Tests and other indicators of quality in reading instruction receive careful attention in many quarters. Parents note well how their young or even as yet of reading achievement, while the public often notes the rise and fall of the status in reading as a sign of the vitality of American education.

This issue of *Reporting on Reading* looks at how tests can be used to improve the quality of reading instruction and more generally at what standards in a reading program mean.

NAEP PREPARES FOR UPCOMING ASSESSMENT

Students who participate in the next national reading assessment, scheduled for 1979-1980, may sit down to tests quite different from the ones they faced in 1975, when the last survey was made. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the project of the Education Commission of the States charged with carrying out the assessment, has already put into effect several changes that will ultimately bear on how the test looks and the kinds of results it will yield.

One of the major differences between the last survey and the one under preparation now, according to Michael J. Noe, NAEP research analyst, is that the reading and literature assessments, previously conducted separately, will be combined in '79.

NAEP's Reading Advisory Group, made up of 12-15 professionals in reading and literature, recommended the combination, Noe said. "The rationale for such a move is the recognition that the same processes are

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GUEST FEATURE:

COMPETENCY TESTING & READING PERFORMANCE



Roger Farr

Reporting on Reading is pleased to feature Roger Farr as guest contributor to this issue on Reading and Measurement. In his article, Professor Farr looks at some of the issues surrounding competency testing in reading and considers some appropriate and some not-so-appropriate ways of using tests.

Roger Farr is Professor of Education and Associate Dean of the School of Education, Indiana University. Professor Farr has been an elementary school teacher and has taught English in junior and senior high school. He is the author of numerous books and articles dealing with the assessment of reading skills and is coeditor of *Reading Research Quarterly*.

There is no question but an influential portion of the public believes that children aren't being taught to read — and that the blame is being laid on the schools. As a response to this concern, state legislatures are seeking remedy by mandating that minimum competency tests be administered to both elementary and secondary students. Surveys indicate that as of March 15, 1978, 33 states had passed some form of legislation establishing minimum competency standards (Pipho, 1978). In the face of this action, it seems reasonable to inquire into the premises on which testing rests and to attempt to clear up misconceptions that surround it.

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COMPETENCY (continued from page 1) Is Reading Achievement Declining?

Minimum competency legislation has become itself endemic because of the popular belief that the quality of education — particularly reading — is declining. A recent Washington newsletter made this point quite cogently: "The House Labor-HEW Appropriations Subcommittee last week told Assistant Secretary for Education Mary Berry that HEW's 12.4 billion 1979 budget request for education will be tough to defend on the House floor because of the declining quality of American Education." (Report on Education Research, 1978). There is, however, ample evidence to contradict this contention (Farr, Fay, and Negley, 1978; Fisher, 1978; Farr, Tuinman, & Rowls, 1974).

The misconception about declining reading achievement is based primarily on the decline on the Scholastic Aptitude Test performance by college-bound high school juniors and seniors. While the score declines on such tests need to be studied, they should not be used as an overall evaluation of the nation's schools or of particular skills they do not measure (Wirtz, 1977).

Furthermore, the SAT tests do not assess basic reading ability. Indeed, an approximate ninth grade reading ability is needed for a student to even read the questions on the SAT. A useful analogy may be drawn between swimming ability and reading. If it were discovered that our Olympic swimmers were achieving poorer times over a number of years, we would not be able to conclude that the basic swimming ability of all swimmers in the country is declining. In the same vein, because those students who are ambitious for college are scoring lower on the SAT tests, we should not conclude that the basic reading ability of all students is declining.

In addition, the SAT-taking population has incorporated a broader span of abilities due to a national commitment to enlarge the opportunities for higher education for segments of our population who could not hope for such opportunity in the past.

Equally important, the SAT does not measure trends in reading achievement. In order to determine trends in reading achievement, we need to assess the reading achievement of various levels of students at different times. The studies that have done this to date show

either that there is little change over the years in performance on reading tests or that students' scores are improving (Farr, Fay, & Negley, 1978).

Can Testing Lead to Reading Improvement?

A test is, at best, an estimate of the behaviors the test developer seeks to measure. If they are properly used, tests can be useful information-gathering tools; if they are misused, they can misdirect the entire educational process. Minimum competency tests in reading achievement can be misused in several ways.

Perhaps the major abuse of tests is their use for a purpose for which they were not intended. Since, for example, the specific purpose of the SAT is to predict which students should succeed in college, the application of its resulting scores to evaluate reading achievement is a serious misuse.

A misuse of tests in general is the assumption that they measure everything that is important in education. When Ernest Boyer, U.S. Commissioner of Education, was testifying before the House Labor-HEW Appropriations Subcommittee, he was asked, "If the Appropriations Subcommittee works to get the \$2 billion increase, can you guarantee us better test scores? And if not, what the devil are we striving for here?" (Report on Education Research, 1978). Such a statement seems to imply that how well we meet all the objectives of education can be determined by testing. Obviously, there are important educational objectives for which we have no effective measures and for which student achievement would be an inadequate measure.

A third misuse of tests arises from the belief that tests can determine causes for poor performance and thus direct the assignment of blame for low scores. Attempts to read causal information from tests are but inferences that can be drawn between the performance the test was designed to measure and the bias of the interpreter. Tests do not offer reasons for the results they produce. Tests may provide some information in the studies that are still needed to determine causes of higher achievement. The extant studies relevant to the issue show that the child's whole experience is causally related to achievement. This means that the public, which wants to pinpoint blame and seems to believe that the blame rests with the schools, is itself a part of the education process. Research seems to support the conclusion that schools reflect and enhance society, that schooling (the education of children) takes place in large measure outside of school, and that environmental factors strongly influence a child's academic achievement.

Finally, tests are misused when they are accepted as the definitive measure of particular behaviors. For example, when a test is labelled "Basic Skills in Reading," the skills it measures are likely to become accepted as the minimum competency skills and the test itself as the definition of "basic reading." Thus performance on the test becomes the definitive determinant of whether a person can read or not. Yet there is much controversy over what the minimum competency skills in reading are; different tests attempt to measure different skills weighted differently to arrive at total scores.

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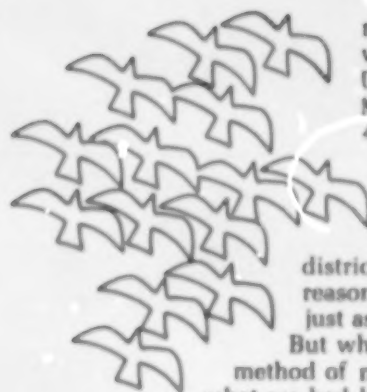
Reporting on Reading is a publication of the Right to Read Effort and is designed to present information on innovative and developmental reading projects and activities throughout the country. It is meant to assist parents, administrators, teachers, aides, and volunteers who work with preschool, elementary, secondary, and adult populations.

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Inquiries or requests for additional information may be directed to Paul Owen, Editor, Reporting on Reading, CEMREL, Inc., 3120 North Street, St. Louis, Missouri 63108.

ON READING

VERIFYING THE GLEAM IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER



"A great many people worked very hard to build our reading program into what it is today," Allan Doran, director of the Matteson (Illinois) 4-Dimensional Reading Program said. "We felt we had developed a worthwhile program that worked in our

district, and we didn't see any reason why it wouldn't work just as well in other districts. But what we needed was a

method of making others aware of what we had learned so that, hopefully, the lives of many more kids could be touched."

The method finally chosen by the staff of the Matteson program is one developed by the U.S. Office of Education and The National Institute of Education. Already used by staff in dozens of other reading programs in all parts of the country, the procedures are available to teachers and administrators associated with any educational program funded by federal sources.

Basically, the method involves collecting convincing evidence that the program works — that it does what it claims to do — and then submitting that evidence to a group within the Education Division of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare called the Joint Dissemination Review Panel. Once the evidence is reviewed and verified, the program becomes available for national dissemination.

What Constitutes Convincing Program Evaluation?

Based on their reviews of hundreds of program evaluations, the Joint Dissemination Review Panel points to two features every convincing evaluation must have. First, the evaluation must use valid and reliable measures to establish that change did occur. A valid measure is one that is logically related to what is being taught. For instance, a program that stresses decoding skills but chooses a test of comprehension skills to measure change would have difficulty justifying the validity of its measures. Reliability on the other hand, refers to the consistency of a measure — does the measure rank the same things in the same order time after time? For example, in ranking a group of youngsters by the size of their heads, a tape measure would rank the children in the same order time after time — a rubber band would not.

Even assuming that valid and reliable measures are selected, a convincing evaluation, according to the panel, requires one more thing. There must be good reason for believing that things are better than they would have been expected to be if the program had

never existed. In other words, some kind of comparison is essential. Without comparison, there will always be nagging doubts about whether the program really had any impact over and above what otherwise would have happened.

Many materials describing the workings of the Joint Dissemination Review Panel and the functions of the National Diffusion Network are now available. Administrators interested in having their programs reviewed by the panel or in learning more about the workings of the panel and the National Diffusion Network may find the following helpful:

□ **The Handbook** is the everything you ever wanted to know about submitting a program to the panel book. Starting with the essentials of an adequate evaluation, and ending with several examples of "model submissions," the book is a complete guide on how the review process operates. (\$3.00 from Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402, Stock #017-080-01824-1)

□ **The National Diffusion Network: Successful Programs and Problem-Solvers** is an envelope-size flyer outlining just what the NDN is and what services it can provide to school people. (Available at no charge from U.S.O.E. Division of Educational Replication, ROB 3, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202)

□ **NDN: A Success Story** is a behind-the-scenes look at the NDN. What it is, why it is, and how it operates are all in this 24-page booklet. Look too for the thumbnail sketches of a selected dozen of the many programs in the NDN. (Available from IEA Associates, 80 S. Main, Concord, New Hampshire 03301; price not set)

□ **Educational Programs That Work** is a catalog of nearly 200 programs that have been approved by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel. Useful for anyone wanting to know where the validated reading programs are and what they're doing. (\$4.95, prepaid, from Order Department, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94117)

Spreading the Word

Once the evidence of program effectiveness submitted to the Joint Dissemination Review Panel is reviewed and the program is approved, the program then joins a pool of about 200 other programs. Through a system called the National Diffusion Network — NDN, for short — approved programs may then be shared with interested school people throughout the country. "Each of the programs approved by the panel represents a valuable resource — it's an effective solution to some real educational problems," Seymour Rubak, U.S. Office of Education senior program officer, explained. "Since time, talent, and money went into developing these solutions, it's important that educators facing virtually identical problems elsewhere be made aware of the solutions already found. That's where the NDN comes in."

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PUTTING TESTS & TESTING INTO PERSPECTIVE

In the guest feature article in this issue, Roger Farr notes that today's students are performing no worse, and, indeed, may be doing better than students tested several decades ago.

To many, however, Farr's conclusions of good cheer are viewed as either incorrect or simply Pollyannish. "The consensus across the United States is that something is very wrong with our public schools," writes Cynthia Parsons, education editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, "and that on top of all their other problems (like costing too much), they don't even teach very well."

What's needed to change that consensus? Many educators say "communication" — continuous information about school programs and student achievement presented in ways that can easily be understood by parents and others in the school community.

Nowhere must that communication be more carefully handled than in discussing a school's testing program

with parents. For example, comparing one youngster's performance in reading to the reading achievements of similar children can be a difficult job even for experienced school people. Jargon, undefined words, or the lack of a good analogy — all can be stumbling blocks.

To assist other educators who must explain test results and the place of testing in the educational program to parents and others in the school community, *Reporting on Reading* has invited two educators to discuss some ways of talking about testing that they have found particularly useful.

E. Roger Trent speaks from his perspective as test development coordinator for the state of Ohio; and, as principal of Westview Elementary School in Hopkins, Minnesota, James Childs comments on how tests fit into an overall plan meant to keep parents continually informed about a school reading program.



E. Roger Trent

Q: When the results of a standardized reading test are made known to the public, how would you suggest that the scores be reported?

E. Roger Trent: Generally, the two best choices are to report the scores as percentiles or in stanines. Either stanines or percentiles allow you to

compare how a youngster is doing now with how well he or she did in the past. Also, either will work if you're interested in how a youngster's achievement compares with that of similar students throughout the country. The difference is that with percentiles you have 100 possible units or steps for reporting changes in achievement. With measures called stanines, you have only 9. My preference is to report test scores in stanines.

Q: Why do you prefer stanines? With only 9 steps instead of the 100 you have with percentiles, don't you run the risk of being accused of whitewashing — of failing to present test results in as detailed a way as possible?

Trent: That's possible of course, but look at it this way. Suppose that you had 100 people running a race. Now, there probably is a great deal of difference in ability between the top one or two people and the next 10 or 20. But if you're back "in the pack" so to speak, just a fraction of a second, a tiny burst of speed may make a sizeable difference in how you finish just because most people are pretty much grouped in the middle. Percentile, precisely because they do make such fine distinctions between performance, may unduly magnify slight — often meaningless — differences. On the other hand, because with stanines it takes a lot more effort to move

up a notch, the gains shown probably represent real differences in achievement.

Q: As you've talked with parents and other community people about test results, where have you found that misunderstanding is most likely to creep in?

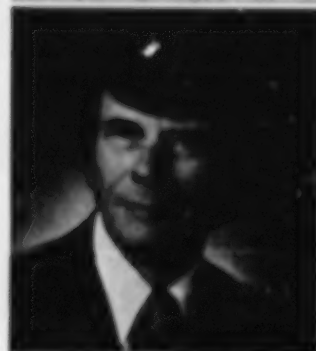
Trent: Explaining what progress — what growth — means on a standardized test is sometimes a pretty difficult concept to try to get across. In everyday life, growth is generally shown by numbers that get larger — a child's weight increases from 80 to 90 pounds, or a company's assets go from \$1 to \$2 million. However, with a norm-referenced test, children can improve their reading skills and still appear to stay right where they were. Growth takes place, but if a child progresses at about the same rate as the norm group, his or her relative rank will stay the same. Look — think about training a group of children to run. You time them in a race before they were trained and again afterwards. Now, the person who placed last before training may place last after it, but that person still may have knocked off two, three, or five minutes from his or her time. For that runner, progress has occurred, but relative to the group it looks as if nothing has changed. That's what the notion of norm-referenced testing means.

Q: Aside from norm-referenced testing, what are some other possibilities for reporting progress?

Trent: I think when you get to the instructional level, the classroom teacher needs a lot more than global or even subtest scores. So I would argue for including some type of assessment of the youngster in terms of exactly what reading skills he or she has developed. Here we're talking about what are called criterion-referenced tests. Apart from their use to teachers, these kinds of tests are extremely useful in explaining the reading program to parents. I know as a parent myself, I appreciate getting from the school a checklist of skills that tells me what skills in reading my youngster has already mastered, what things she's still working on, and what things haven't been introduced yet. Still, re-

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garageless of what kinds of tests you use or what kinds of scores you report, you've got to remember that test results are only part of the picture. I would propose that test results not be conveyed or interpreted in isolation from other in-school and out-of-school achievement. Test results are another piece of the puzzle that help us to understand more about the child. They shouldn't be thought of as the whole puzzle.



James Childs

Q: How do you keep parents informed about the kinds of reading tests their children will be taking?

James Childs: First of all, in the fall we have a curriculum meeting. At that meeting the district reading coordinator, the reading teacher, and I explain the goals and objectives of the reading program and

show parents all the materials and tests that will be used. Then, after a test is given and scored, we send the actual test booklets home.

Q: Isn't it risky to send a test booklet home with a child?

Childs: It is. But we feel parents have a right to know how their children are doing and that right, we feel, outweighs whatever risks might be involved. Then too, the test isn't just sent home without any explanation. Parents receive information about how the test is scored, and I send a letter along stressing the importance of keeping the test results very private and not using the results to punish a child or to brag about how well a child is doing. I ask parents to consider how they would feel if their spouse or their boss, for example, made their shortcomings public information and then to act accordingly. So far, we've had no problems at all.

Q: How do you feel about releasing to the media the results of a standardized reading test taken by those in a building or the entire school district?

Childs: I think the schools have an obligation to let the community know how the schools are doing — especially in something as important as reading. For example, if you want to know the test results on a set of tires for your car, you can get them from the company. Schools, I feel, ought to be just as accountable. The issue is, I think, not whether or not to release test scores, but how they are released. Test scores have to be put into a larger perspective.

Q: Explain what you mean by putting testing into a larger perspective.

Childs: Releasing test results is just one part of the continuous communication that ought to go on between school and home. It's important for parents to see tests as only one of many ways available to them for judging the reading program. If parents are continually informed about the whole reading program, it's less likely that our efforts will rise or fall on just what the tests say. □

NAEP PREPARES (continued from page 1)

involved in reading all types of material, both literary and non-literary. Whether the passage the student reads is short or long, taken from a story or from a can of cat food, the students' grasp of the meaning of words, of sentences, of sentences in context, and of paragraphs, is still being assessed."

A New Objective

Students in 1979-1980 will be assessed for more than their comprehension of words, sentences, and paragraphs, however. They will be tested as well for the value they place on reading and literature — the first time this attitude has been formally measured by NAEP. "Valuing will be cut in two parts," Noe explained, "with an attempt to measure the value the student places on reading and literature as they pertain to self and as they relate to the culture." Do students value literature as a source of enjoyment? As a means of developing self-understanding and personal goals? As a means of understanding human beings and the diversity of culture? These are some of the questions the new survey will address.

The literature assessment in particular will have a new direction in 1979. Previously students were asked to identify characters and literary works in order to "prove" their literary appreciation. The test now being prepared takes a different view of the topic, however. "Students will be asked to read passages of literature and answer questions that require analysis and evaluation of the text," explained Robert Larson, director, development, analysis, and research at NAEP. In earlier tests, some children might not have been able to answer the questions at all, because they hadn't read the "right" books."



(Courtesy of National Assessment of Educational Progress)

Technical Changes in '79

Other, more technical changes also mark the work being done for this assessment. This time, according to NAEP, considerably more effort is going into specifying or detailing the objectives for the test. This amounts to pages and pages of explanation of an objective like "comprehends lexical relationships," so that item writers and interpreters have a clearer idea of what behaviors are being measured. "The number of items on a test won't be different," Noe explained, "nor will the number of objectives. But the test items themselves should

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COMPETENCY (continued from page 2)

How Tests Can Be Useful Tools

Despite the misuses and the limitations of tests, they can be used as guides in instructional planning if simple principles are followed. Broadly, tests should be recognized as attempts to produce measures of specific behaviors or of performance tasks. They can also solicit observations, discussion, or work samples. Tests produce these types of information under prescribed conditions, such as the instruction to "Read these paragraphs and answer these questions" or "Tell me about the book you've been reading." By broadly defining test purposes, then, the door is open to collecting all sorts of useful information under a variety of conditions.

To be most useful, tests should be dictated by curriculum. Those who administer tests should be fully familiar with the instructional program that teaches the behavior the test purports to measure. This means understanding the major features of the program and their sequence in the program in relation to the goals of the program. It also means knowing the particular students — their interests, backgrounds, abilities, and needs — that the program instructs. With this kind of information, the test administrator can select the tests which will provide the information most useful to making the education of the children tested more effective.

In short, one should choose tests that produce information that informs on achievement as it reflects instructional goals. For example: What are the students supposed to do when they complete this lesson or this sequence of lessons? What is the sequence of skills or what are the strategies a student should use to achieve this goal? Thus one uses tests as assessments of those things that need to be understood to plan instruction. It isn't just students that need to be examined, but also materials, teaching procedures, and even classroom organization.

The purpose for testing should be understood by all interested in the effectiveness of education: administrators, boards of education, the general public, and teachers all have decisions to make about the reading program, for example. Each group needs relevant information for making decisions. Testing can provide some of that information.

Finally, it should be recognized that all tests are only estimates of real behaviors; thus placing too much faith in a single piece of information is always dangerous. This fact alone recommends against the use of minimum competency testing; coupled to the potential misuses and to the valid uses of tests, the folly of relying on the single competency measure to make any educational decisions should become obvious.

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Q If minimum competency tests in reading aren't the answer, how can schools respond to a public clamor about achievement in reading?

Roger Farr: There are a couple of issues tied together in that question. First, I think educators have to begin by allaying the public's growing fear that schools are not doing an adequate job. Now, I'm not saying that everything's perfect and that we don't have any problems, but neither is it true that everyone who graduates from high school can't read. In fact, it's my conviction from having studied the data on trends in reading achievement for quite some time now, that reading achievement is certainly no worse and probably better than it was several decades ago.

Now, the second thing: I do not believe that testing is inappropriate. I certainly believe that all kinds of tests — including competency tests — are appropriate if they are used carefully and explained adequately. For example, don't expect anything positive to happen by publicizing scores in isolation. By failing to give lots of accompanying information about what's going on in schools and what the schools are trying to do, we've led many boards of education to believe that test scores tell the whole story. And they certainly don't. Until we educators develop more understandable ways to communicate more about what's going on in schools, we're going to be stuck with being judged just by what the test scores say. □

NAEP PREPARES (continued from page 3)

be more specific, more clearly related to each other and to the objectives."

Work is now in progress at the Universities of Pittsburgh and Minnesota to develop the items for the test. The schedule calls for items to be written, reviewed, and field-tested by November, 1978. After that, the exercises will be reviewed for cultural fairness, and technical problems will be weeded out. The tests will then be administered in 1979-1980 to between 80 and 90 thousand children of ages 9, 13, and 17 in every region of the country. The results of the survey will be published in 1981.

Once the results are reported, classroom teachers as well as researchers can make good use of the work that has gone into the survey. "We received many requests from teachers and curriculum planners for information on the tests' objectives," Noe said. "Many apparently use them to plan their own syllabi. They can devise their own lessons around the objectives we've worked out."

Inquiries about the upcoming assessment may be directed to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295. □

ON READING

RESOURCES

Testing Adult Readers

Much remains to be done in developing literacy tests for adults, contend Dean H. Nafziger, R. Brent Thompson, Michael D. Hiscox, and Thomas R. Owen, authors of *Tests of Functional Adult Literacy: An Evaluation of Currently Available Instruments*. One part of the difficulty is that not everyone agrees on what the word literacy means. Another is that many of the existing literacy tests have yet to undergo a thorough technical tune-up. Tests reviews what was available (as of 1975) by providing a brief description of each and then by giving each test a letter grade (A, B, C, or D) depending on how well it measures up on standards of measurement validity, examinee appropriateness, technical excellence, and administrator usability.

Copies available from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 710 S.W. Second Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204; \$4.95.

Avoid the Minefields If You Can

Evaluating a school reading program can be a hazardous undertaking. The central problem is giving a convincing answer to the question, "How much more did students learn by participating in the program than they would have learned without it?" To help answer that question, the U.S. Office of Education has developed *A Practical Guide to Measuring Project Impact on Student Achievement*. Step-by-step, the monograph discusses ways of collecting, analyzing, and reporting data that will satisfy most detractors. Sprinkled throughout is information about "hazards," so-called because disregarding them may indeed be injurious to a sound evaluation.

Copies available from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402; \$1.90; stock no. 017-080-01480-2.

Testing the Teacher

If it seems self-evident that teachers need to have a good grasp of reading fundamentals before trying to teach them, why then have so few instruments been developed for assessing what teachers know about reading? asks H.L. Narang in her paper, "Measurement of Teacher Knowledge of Reading." In her paper, Narang groups available instruments into three categories — knowledge of specific skills in teaching reading, diagnostic ability of the teacher, and knowledge of reading practices and instructional techniques — and then reviews and critiques each.

Available from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, Virginia 22210; \$1.07; order no. ED 132 538.

Measuring in Seven Languages

Evaluation of bilingual education programs has long been hampered by a lack of adequate assessment instruments. Indeed, until *A Guide to Assessment Instruments for Limited-English-Speaking Students* by Barbara P. Pletcher, Nancy A. Locks, Dorothy F. Reynolds, and Bonnie G. Sisson was available, it was difficult to find out what tests existed. Now, by using *A Guide*, school people charged with locating assessment instruments will be able to find tests that may be appropriate for limited-English-speaking children of elementary-school age whose first language is Chinese, French, Italian, Navajo, Portuguese, Spanish, or Tagalog.

Copies available from Santillana Publishing Co., 575 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10022; \$9.50.

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To: **Reporting on Reading**
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VERIFYING THE GLEAN

(continued from page 3)

Through various means, the NDN provides educators with assistance in choosing an exemplary program that will fit their own requirements and then putting them in touch with those who can provide the training and help needed to start the new program.

What's In It for Me?

Are the benefits that accrue from validation great enough to outweigh the difficulties of gaining it? The staff of many validated programs think they are. "When your program is approved by the panel what you get is instant credibility," Roy Bastian, director of Project Discovery, Red Oak, Iowa, said. "School superintendents in other districts know they're not getting a pig-in-a-poke when they decide to adopt your program. Because your program has been validated, others know that a substantial amount of evidence stands behind it."

Allan Dornseif of the Matteson program points to increased staff solidarity that comes from national recognition. "There's a sense of pride in having our little district on the map, so to speak. Our teachers justifiably can take satisfaction in knowing that they can do things just as well as teachers working in districts a lot bigger and a lot more powerful than ours."

Unanticipated Benefits

Apart from national recognition, staff from a number of programs approved by the review panel point to another important, yet unanticipated benefit of being designated a validated program. Maria Claudina Hernandez, director of Confluence of Cultures for an Affluent Tomorrow, a validated bilingual program in Alice, Texas, explains: "Because a lot more people know about us, we have an opportunity to talk and exchange ideas with many more people. As they're learning about us, we're learning about them. They benefit, but so do we. I'm certain that that kind of cross-fertilization of ideas contributes immensely to keeping our own program vital." □

TALKING IT OVER

Grouping Without Exhaustion — Any Solutions?

Your invitation to respond to the new "Talking It Over" feature gives me an opportunity to pose a question that has concerned me for some time.

As a teacher of reading, grouping students for instruction so as to give each child a program within which he or she can function successfully has created management headaches for me. Last year, I was trying to plan for and execute responsibilities I felt toward seven groups of children, meeting with them twice a day. This past school year until just recently, I have been trying to cope with six groups twice a day. Now I am down to five groups. But I feel I have been spreading myself too thin. I don't feel I have done an INTENSIVE job with the students. My present situation seems to physically be more than I can accomplish.

Our present reading series is a level approach. As you well know, there may be any number of groups working in any one level. My problem, as I see it, centers around teaching these levels concurrently. The diversification among the three is where my difficulty is coming from, I think.

Does anyone know of any studies that have determined how many levels and how many actual groups each teacher should have to be most effective? I feel I need help.

— Mrs. Roy G. VanWye, First Grade Teacher,
Edinburg, Indiana

Address your comments, questions, answers, or ideas to: *Reporting on Reading*, CEMREL, Inc., 3120 59th Street, St. Louis, Missouri 63139.

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September

Administrative Organization
and Current Reading Programs